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What Parents Need To Know About The Video Games Their Kids Can't Live Without

Video games used to be so simple, but nowadays there's so much more you have to know about – online video games, RPGs (role playing games), MMOGs (massively multiplayer online games), parental controls, mods, and all the new game consoles and handheld devices. Where to begin!!! With over a *thousand* new video game titles hitting stores shelves each year, how can today's parent choose video games that are right for their kids? As with any decision a parent must make, information is key, and the following tips will prepare you to make wise and informed choices.

- **Check the Ratings.** The ESRB video game ratings and content descriptors can be found on virtually every computer and video game sold, and they provide useful and reliable information to help you make educated decisions about the games you choose for their children. **Rating symbols** on the front of the package suggest what age the game is best suited for, and **content descriptors** on the back provide additional detail about what's in the game.
- **Monitor your child's video game play, and play with them.** Just as with TV, movies, and the Internet, it is always a good idea to be aware of and involved in your children's video games. Play games with your kids, and talk with them about the ones they like. This is a good way to have fun together as well as get to know which games your child finds to be interesting and exciting, and why.
- **Exercise caution with online-enabled games.** Some games let users play with strangers over an Internet connection, and MMOGs (massively multiplayer online games) enable online gaming on a vast scale. But it's important to realize that some of these games contain user-generated content that may not be part of the rating, such as character models ("skins"), settings ("maps"), live chat, weapons and more. Online-enabled games carry a warning on the package that reads "Game Experience May Change During Online Play."
- **Be aware of downloadable mods.** Most PC games can be altered through the use of downloadable programs called "mods" (short for modifications), which are broadly available on the Internet and can change a game's content. As with online-enabled games, any player-created or modified content cannot be considered in ESRB ratings, and so it's important for parents to be aware that some mods can alter a game in ways that may be inconsistent with the ESRB rating.
- **Learn about and use parental controls.** Some of the newer video game consoles and handheld devices including the Xbox360, Wii, PlayStation3, and PSP offer parents the ability to limit what type of content their children can access by activating built-in parental control features.

By activating parent controls you can ensure that your kids only play games that carry ratings you deem appropriate for them.

- **Go beyond the ratings.** Additional information about the games your kids want can be found on numerous websites and in game enthusiast magazines, many of which provide extensive reviews and details about game content. Some may even offer screenshots (pictures from the gameplay), interactive demos and trailers, which can give you a good sense of a game's content. The **Parent Resources** section of the ESRB website offers links to some of those websites including a few that recommend family-friendly and children's video games. Another good source of information can be employees at your local video game store. They are often gamers themselves, and are likely to be familiar with the games your child is pulling off the shelves, so don't be afraid to ask them for their recommendations or any other questions that you may have.

CONTACT INFORMATION

For more information about choosing appropriate video games or to sign up for ESRB's **e-newsletter**, visit www.esrb.org.

Questions? Contact the D.C. Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs' Office of Consumer Protection at 202-442-4400 or visit www.dkra.dc.gov.